

GET PREPARED ---- BE SAFE AND AWARE

You may have heard the Pacific Northwest region might be hit with severe weather this coming winter. A strong La Nina, with cooler ocean temperatures near the Equator, tends to result in much colder winters, increased precipitation, lowland snow and significant windstorms for us. Scientists had to look back 55 years for a similar set-up to winter.

Now is the time for all of us to take stock in our preparedness plans and make sure we have the items on hand to make it easier to get through the winter. Below are some basic guidelines.

Have a family plan:

- Designate an out-of-area contact person, far enough away so he/she won't be involved in the same emergency.
- Have at least a seven-day supply of food, water, medications and other special needs for your family. Don't forget your pets!
- Be sure your disaster preparedness kit contains light sticks, flashlights and radios with extra batteries.
- Make copies of vital records and secure in a safe place—safety deposit, or fire/flood proof box.
- Build an emergency supply kit for your car, workplace, and your child's school.
- Sign up for **Pierce County ALERT** to receive emergency messages on your cell phones, work phones, text-to-cell, e-mail accounts, etc. You can register online or get more information at www.piercecountywa.gov and click on the link at the bottom of the page, or call 253.798.6595.

Power outages: Both wind storms and snowstorms can cause power outages. Preparing now can help avoid some of the problems.

- Have a corded telephone—cordless phones don't work when the power is out.
- Have a safe alternative heat source and supply of fuel. **Never burn charcoal or use a generator indoors.**
- Avoid using candles—they can cause fires.
- Turn off lights and electrical appliances, computers, etc., except the refrigerator or freezer. Leave one lamp on so you will know when the power comes back on.
- Never use gas ovens, ranges, barbecues, or portable or propane heaters for indoor heating—they use oxygen and create carbon monoxide.
- Use and store food carefully:
 - Use food first that can spoil.
 - Keep doors to refrigerators and freezers closed—a refrigerator freezer will keep food frozen up to a day; a separate fully-loaded freezer up to two days.
 - **When in doubt, throw it out!**

Floods If you live in an area where floods occur, do the following:

- Plan and discuss with your family where you will go and the route to take if you have to evacuate your home.
- Purchase flood insurance and take photos of your valuables.
- Maintain at least a half tank of gas in your car at all times.

- If you are told to leave—**don't wait—evacuate!** Grab your go-kit, your family and your pets and get to higher ground.
- Do not try to walk or drive through flooded waters— even 6 inches of moving water can knock you off your feet and cars can be swept away in 2 feet of water.

Winter Storms: Winter storms bring many of the above hazards but also include additional concerns.

- Prepare your home for cold weather—wrap pipes, and repair leaks in the roof and around doors and windows.
- Be sure your fireplace functions properly.
- If you have a kerosene heater, refuel it outside and keep it at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Reduce the temperature in your home to conserve fuel and heat only the area of your home you need to use—keep other parts closed off.
- Dress in layers—several layers of lighter-weight, warm clothing keeps you warmer than one layer of heavy clothing. Wear mittens rather than gloves and keep your head covered.
- Eat regularly—food provides calories that help maintain body heat.
- Have rock salt or sand for traction on ice and keep it next to your snow shovel.
- Do not drive unnecessarily.
- If you must drive, be sure you have snow tires, winter tires, and/or snow chains (and know how to put them on).
- Let people know where you are going and the route you are taking—stay on main roads.
- Have extra clothing, food, water, and a blanket for each person in your vehicle.
- Carry a cell phone.
- Make sure you have jumper cables and flares.
- Other emergency supplies include a shovel and kitty litter or sand for traction and a coffee can with a lid and toilet paper for hygiene use.
- If you get stuck, stay inside your vehicle.
 - Use a bright distress flag or your hazard lights to draw attention.
 - If trapped in a blizzard, clear your tail pipe and run your engine and heater for 10 minutes every hour.
 - At night, keep the dome light on so rescuers can find you.

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Get prepared—be safe and aware.